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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000934

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-SECESSION LAW REACTION: IMPATIENTLY WAITING

REF: TAIPEI 819

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David J. Keegan, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: Political and media focus is growing over PRC plans to enact an Anti-Annexation Law during the March National People's Congress (NPC) session. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) will hold an anti-annexation rally in Taipei on March 6, the same day as the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) organizes a larger event in Kaohsiung. DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang will announce his party's intention to hold another large scale rally in April if Beijing proceeds with its proposed law. The ruling and opposition Legislative Yuan (LY) caucuses also agreed on March 4 on a resolution urging Beijing not to approve the draft Anti-Annexation Law. Despite the frenzied media and political atmosphere, Chen administration officials say they plan to maintain a low-profile in the period leading up to the announcement of the PRC's law text. Officials warn, however, that if the PRC law is strongly worded, Taiwan could witness protests on the scale of the 2003 Hong Kong demonstrations over revisions to Article 23 of the Basic Law.

One veteran DPP moderate assessed to AIT, however, that the tone and scale of Taiwan's public reaction may be determined largely by how President Chen Shui-bian decides to interpret the "severity" of the PRC law once its contents are revealed. End Summary.

Dueling Legislatures

2. (C) The Taiwan media and political world are increasingly focused on PRC plans to pass an Anti-Secession Law at the upcoming NPC session. On March 4, LY President Wang Jin-pyng announced that the ruling and opposition LY caucuses had agreed to pass a resolution urging the NPC not to take action on an Anti-Secession Law. Although the full text of the resolution has not yet been released, Wang said the parties will state their shared commitment to the "sovereignty of the Republic of China" and urge Beijing not to destroy the positive recent atmospherics across the Taiwan Strait. Representatives from the LY's four party caucuses met several times on March 3-4 to work out a compromise text that could gain unanimous support. On March 4, the TSU provided AIT a copy of its draft resolution (faxed to EAP/TC). (Note: In doing so, however, the TSU violated a prior agreement to keep their meeting with AIT out of the press. End Note.)

Rallies to Start Out Small

3. (C) In addition to the joint resolution, the TSU and DPP plan to hold separate public rallies in Taipei and Kaohsiung on March 6 to protest the PRC's legislative moves. DPP central party officials tell AIT that their Taipei rally will employ less provocative themes than the TSU's event. DPP Kaohsiung City Chairman Chao Wen-nan, however, told the AIT/K Branch Chief that local DPP officials, including Acting Mayor Chen Chi-mai, have agreed to attend the March 6 TSU rally in exchange for a pledge that speakers not criticize President Chen or the DPP. Former President Lee Teng-hui, who has repeatedly lashed out at Chen and the DPP over Chen's February 24 meeting with opposition leader James Soong (Septel), will lead the TSU's Kaohsiung rally (Comment: given the TSU's failure to fulfill its promise to keep the media away from its March 4 meeting with AIT, we are skeptical over Lee's willingness to hold his fire against Chen based on an informal agreement with the DPP. End Comment.). Executive Yuan (EY) Research, Development, and Evaluation Council (RDEC) Vice Minister Chen Chun-lin told AIT that the DPP rally will likely be sparsely attended, since the party will not activate its mobilization machinery. TSU Secretary General Chen Chien-ming, on the other hand, told AIT his party does plan to bus in supporters from around southern Taiwan to ensure a respectable turnout.

4. (C) Presidential Office aide Lin You-chang told AIT that the Chen administration will keep distance from political and NGO activities, but is continuing to review options for how to respond when the NPC takes formal action on the proposed law. Lin asserted that a referendum is now off the table (Reftel), but he added that some form of Anti-Annexation Law is still under consideration, especially if the contents of the PRC law are judged to be particularly egregious.

Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chief Secretary Jan Jyh-horng told AIT that if the government does support an Anti-Annexation Law, its contents will be considerably less provocative than the draft put forward by the TSU. Lin confirmed Premier Frank Hsieh's recent public announcement that the government will temporarily halt further economic opening measures due to Beijing's moves over the Anti-Secession Law (Septel). Lin said the timing of Beijing's Anti-Secession Law is unfortunate, since the political atmosphere in Taiwan supporting cross-Strait economic liberalization is the best it has been for many years.

All Eyes on President Chen

15. (C) Veteran DPP Legislator Hong Chi-chang dismissed assertions that there is an outpouring of popular anger over the PRC law. Hong told AIT on March 3 that Taiwan's public reaction to the Anti-Secession Law will be largely shaped by how President Chen decides to play the issue once the draft law's contents are revealed. Hong cautioned that, based on exchanges with authoritative PRC interlocutors during a recent (unpublicized) visit to the Mainland, the Anti-Secession Law is likely to contain elements that Chen could choose to interpret as provocative.

16. (C) National Security Council (NSC) Senior Advisor Lin Jin-chang contacted AIT on March 4 on instructions from President Chen to report that DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang had just informed the President that Su will announce on March 6 that the DPP will conduct a major anti-annexation rally in April if the PRC passes its draft law. According to Lin, Su wanted to announce that the President would attend the DPP's April rally and was told that, for the time being, the President would prefer not to commit publicly on the issue. However, Lin added that if the PRC produces a strongly-worded draft, Chen "will have no choice but to respond to the voices of the people." Lin warned that a DPP-led April rally could see turnout on the scale of the 2003 Hong Kong anti-Article 23 demonstrations. When pressed, Lin said that President Chen is likely to lead such an event.

Comment: Rolling Start

17. (C) TSU mobilization efforts notwithstanding, the March 6 rallies are likely to be limited in size. Nevertheless, both the Pan-Green parties are clearly gearing up for a sustained public campaign against Beijing's proposed law, despite the President's instructions for a low-key public posture during the period leading up to the NPC debate. There remains a clear divide among Chen's advisors, with some counseling a moderate reaction, especially if the PRC law is not overtly provocative, and others urging a strong response to any movement on the legislation. Thus far, Chen has managed to straddle the fence. Once the contents of the PRC law are revealed, however, Chen will have come down on one side or the other, and his decision is likely to guide the tenor and volume of Taiwan's response.

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